

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 08445 231729Z

40/43

ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3562

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA UNN

CINCPAC

DIA

SECDEF

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8445

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION REPORT AS OF 2100 MAY
23

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: A. BANGKOK 8391, B. BANGKOK 8399

SUMMARY: AFTER AN UNHURRIED, ALMOST ANTI-CLIMATIC CLOSED
DOOR DISCUSSION, THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA)
OFFERED THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP TO SANYA THAMMASAK. NLA
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 08445 231729Z

SPEAKER KHUKRIT PRAMOTE INFORMED SANYA THE AFTERNOON OF

MAY 23. SANYA PUT OFF AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS DECISION UNTIL MAY 24. DESPITE THE DELAY MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT SANYA WILL ACCEPT THE DRAFT. IF SANYA DECLINES, A POSSIBILITY WE DO NOT CONSIDER LIKELY, THE INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE NLA WILL TURN TO RESIGNED JUSTICE MINISTER PRAKOP HUTASING, ALL THESE EVENTS ARE TAKING PLACE IN A CALM AND DELIBERATE ATMOSPHERE. END SUMMARY.

1. NLA MEMBERS DESCRIBED THE AMBIENCE WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY AS UNHURRIED AND DELIBERATE AS THE NLA MOVED TO OFFER THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP TO SANYA THAMMASAK IN A CLOSED DOOR SESSION WHICH BEGAN AT 1030 MAY 23. THE OUTCOME WAS ALMOST A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, ALTHOUGH ONE MEMBER MENTIONED A MIDNIGHT PHONE CALL TRYING TO INFLUENCE HIS VOTE. KASEM CHATIKAWANIT, WHO CHAIRS THE "GROUP OF 99," PROPOSED SANYA THAMMASAK'S NAME TO THE NLA. THERE WAS SCATTERED OPPOSITION AND SPEAKER KHUKRIT PRAMOT BATTLED DOWN ATTEMPTS TO PLACE HIS NAME IN NOMINATION. KHUKRIT ENDED THE "CONSULTATIONS" WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE NLA WAS UNANIMOUS FOR SANYA. NO ONE QUESTIONED THIS CONCLUSION. ONE NLA MEMBER MENTIONED TO US THAT THE ASSEMBLY FELT THAT ANY OTHER NOMINATIONS WOULD DETRACT FROM THE UNANIMITY OF THE PROPOSAL. ANOTHER OBSERVER SUGGEST THAT THE NLA DESIRE TO AVOID A LONG, DRAWN OUT, AND DIVISIVE FIGHT MADE THE QUICK RENOMINATION OF SANYA EASIER. SHOULD SANYA DECLINE A POSSIBILITY WE REGARD AS UNLIKELY, THE NLA IS PREPARED TO NOMINATE RESIGNED JUSTICE MINISTER PRAKOP HUTASING.

2. SPEAKER KHUKRIT AND THE TWO DEPUTY SPEAKERS LEFT THE NLA FOR THEIR 1430 APPOINTMENT WITH SANYA AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE TO FORMALLY CONVEY THE WILL OF THE ASSEMBLY. AMID THE SPARKLE OF FLASHBULBS, KHUKRIT SAID HE WAS CONFIDENT SANYA WOULD ACCEPT. UPON HIS RETURN KHUKRIT SAID THAT SANYA ASKED FOR TIME TO CONSIDER THE ASSEMBLY'S OFFER AND THAT HE WOULD RESPOND THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 24. KHUKRIT ADDED THAT "I FEEL ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S HONESTY AND LOYALTY, AND THAT HE WILL PLACE NATIONAL INTERESTS ABOVE ALL ELSE AND THAT HE WILL NOT REFUSE TO ACCEPT HIS NOMINATION FOR REAPPOINTMENT."

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 08445 231729Z

3. MINISTER OF THE STATE UNIVERSITIES' BUREAU, ARUN SORATHAT, TOLD THE PAO MAY 23 THAT EXPECTS SANYA WILL ACCEPT THE RENOMINATION AND THAT ARUN HIMSELF WOULD RETURN TO THE CABINET, PROBABLY IN THE SAME POSITION. ARUN SPECULATED THAT SANYA WOULD INSIST ON RETAINING BUNMA WONGSAWAN AS FINANCE MINISTER.

4. SPEAKER KHUKRIT SET THE STAGE FOR SANYA'S RENOMINATION

WITH AN INTERVIEW CARRIED IN HIS OWN "THAI RATH" MAY 23 SUPPORTING SANYA BUT SAYING THAT BUNMA WONGSAWAN WOULD BE A GOOD PRIME MINISTER. AFTER SETTING UP THAT STRAWMAN, KHUKRIT PREDICTED THAT THE RESIGNATION OF THE SANYA CABINET WOULD BE A BAD OMEN FOR THE COUNTRY. POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHAOS WOULD FOLLOW, DEMORALIZING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND INCREASING CRIME. ALL BECAUSE NO GOOD AND HONEST PEOPLE HAVE THE COURAGE TO LEAD THE GOVERNMENT.

5. THE MILITARY, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER GROUPS INCLUDING THE NLA, HAS DEMONSTRATED NO PARTICULAR NERVOUSNESS DURING THE RECENT RESIGNATIONS. THE MILITARY ARE LETTING THE CIVILIAN LEADERS THRASH THINGS OUT. A KEY MILITARY OFFICER ASSIGNED THERE TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR MAY 23 THAT THE SUPREME COMMAND WAS JUST SITTING BACK LISTENING TO THE RADIO. THAI MILITARY OFFICERS IN UDORN HAVE TOLD THEIR JUSMAG ADVISOR THAT THEY HAD RECEIVED NO ORDERS TO GO ON ALERT.

6. THE PEOPLE FOR DEMOCRACY (PFD) RAISED THEIR PROFILE DURING THE RECENT CABINET RESIGNATIONS. PFD ISSUED A STATEMENT MAY 22 URGING THAT THE GOVERNMENT DROP SIX MINISTERS FROM THE PREVIOUS SANYA CABINET AND FOCUS ON OVERHAULING THE MINISTRIES RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL AND INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS. THE SIX PEOPLE THE PFD DO NOT WANT RETURNED ARE THE INTERIOR MINISTER AND ONE OF HIS DEPUTIES, THE EDUCATION, INDUSTRY, AND COMMERCE MINISTERS, AND GENERAL SAWAENG SENANARONG, MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE.

7. COMMENTS: THE RESIGNATION OF THE SANYA CABINET HAS BEEN SOMETHING OF A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT. THE GENERAL PUBLIC, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO AGREE WITH THE END RESULT OF A RESHUFFLED CABINET. SANYA NOW HAS THE ADVANTAGE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BANGKO 08445 231729Z

THAT SINCE THE NLA HAS ASKED HIM TO STAY ON, HE CAN DEMAND ITS SUPPORT AND MAY ASK PROMINENT NLA MEMBERS TO JOIN IN A CABINET. SOME NLA MEMBERS HAVE TOLD US THAT ALTHOUGH RESIGNATION EN MASSE WAS A MESSY WAY OF ACHIEVING A CABINET RESHUFFLE, THE EXERCISE WILL DEVELOP A NEW MANDATE AND BOLSTER THE NEW CABINET'S PERSEVERENCE.

7. SANYA'S TELEVISION ADDRESS MAY 22 SUBTLY BUT CLEARLY CHIDED AN OBSTREPEROUS PRESS AND IMPATIENT CRITICS. THE CHORUS OF FRETFUL FAULTFINDERS WILL PROBABLY QUIET DOWN, AND GIVE SANYA AT LEAST A SHORT REST. THERE IS STILL, HOWEVER, THE DANGER THAT A NEW SANYA GOVERNMENT WILL DRIFT AS THE FIRST ONE DID, AND THAT AFTER A BRIEF HIATUS THE CLAMOR MAY RESUME.
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